

A SMOOTH-FRUITED FORM OF ASCLEPIAS SYRIACA.

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OUR common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca* L.) is abundant in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, as elsewhere, growing in open fields and along the roads and streams everywhere. Ordinarily it is easily recognized in flower by its stout and simple stem and its many large umbels of fragrant purplish flowers, and later, in fruit, by the large pointed mostly curved or falcate pods, which are softly tomentose and all "echinate" with warts or "soft spinous processes." The "echinate" pod is a diagnostic character by which this and a western species similar in this respect, are segregated in our manuals from the other species with smooth or unarmed pods.

So, on September 14, 1918, while botanizing in that part of Lanesboro, Massachusetts, called Berkshire, I was greatly interested to find growing in low open ground, with plants having the normal echinate fruit, a small colony of our Milkweed, bearing pods which were all straight, quite unarmed, and merely velvety. There was no vestige or rudiment of the spinous processes. Recourse to my herbarium also disclosed a plant, which I collected at Grafton, Massachusetts, Sept. 7, 1902, on which the two ripe pods were, like those from Berkshire, short, straight and quite smooth. Evidently I had noted and preserved the specimen, as often happens, for the very reason that, in the complete absence of the spinous processes, it conspicuously failed to conform to the echinate character ascribed to the fruit in this species. Nevertheless I had called it, "*A. Cornuti* Decaisne," the name by which this species was then known; and itself, curiously though unintentionally, suggestive of the "horns" which are normally present.

The only reference which I have found to this aberrant form is in the Supplement to the Synoptical Flora of N. A. Vol. II, Part I, where (p. 401) is the following note by Dr. Gray:— "*A. CORNUTI* Decaisne, p. 91.— *A. grandiflora*, Bertol. Misc. Bot. xii. 47, t. 3, 4, 5, raised from seed from North America, by its flowers and follicles can be no other than this common Milkweed. Pods in this species are sometimes found with hardly a trace of the soft spinous processes,

sometimes with very long and shaggy ones." And this note is based upon a sheet in the Gray Herbarium containing six, more or less smooth-fruited inflorescences only, over the following label "Smooth and muricate follicles of *Asclepias Cornuti*, sent by"

In the private herbarium of Walter Deane, at Cambridge, also I find a similar series of follicles collected by J. H. Mellichamp in South Carolina, verified by Dr. Gray, and also "illustrating variation to smooth pod." Two other specimens of the smooth-fruited form may also be cited, one collected by Mr. Deane, at Waltham, Massachusetts, August 13, 1910, now in his herbarium, the other in the herbarium of the New England Botanical Club, collected by Sydney Harris, at Dedham, Massachusetts, September 27, 1896, both with unarmed fruit like my Berkshire material.

Apparently then the echinate character in pods of this species, heretofore so much relied upon, is not invariable, and it seems well to recognize so signal a departure from an established and familiar type. I have therefore ventured to call this Berkshire plant, with wholly unarmed follicles

ASCLEPIAS SYRIACA L. forma **inermis**, f. n., formae typicae similis differt folliculis omnino emuricatis saepius rectis.— Low open ground, Lanesboro, Massachusetts, September 14, 1918, *Churchill* (TYPE deposited in the herbarium of the New England Botanical Club).

The closely similar specimens cited above from eastern Massachusetts and South Carolina would seem to indicate that this smooth-fruited form will be found widely distributed with the typical echinate-fruited one. Further study may disclose other differences which would justify a varietal or higher rank than seems at present warranted.

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